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ABSTRACT

Frankl's logotherapy, a technique of searching for meaning in life, is presented as a counseling theory which borders religion but does not overlap, by taking both the mentally healthy individual and the patient in psychotherapy to this boundary, and challenging him/her to decide whether religion can be an integral part of life meaning and purpose. The strategies reviewed indicate that logotherapy can: (1) help the person to explore religious values applicable to him/her; (2) assist in exploring other values; and (3) for those who hold religious leanings, guide the combination of secular psychotherapy and ecclesiastical purpose to yield a deeper life meaning that can be found elsewhere. (Author)

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Logotherapy as a Bridge Between Religion and Psychotherapy

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The founder of logotherapy, Dr. Viktor E. Frankl (1) of the University of Vienna Medical School, likes to say that religion and logotherapy border each other but do not overlap. One may, if (s)he wishes, step easily from one to the other, but need not do so. Logotherapy is a technique of searching for meaning and purpose in life, the need to find which Frankl holds to be the primary human motivation. Religion is a special systematic approach to a meaningful interpretation of the nature of the universe, usually based on the fundamental assumption that a superhuman Power exists and has purposively designed the world and the human race. To find individual meaning in one's personal life, which is the goal of logotherapy, one must first make his/her own interpretation of the nature of the world and of all life. (S)he must decide whether a religious or non-religious approach best fits his/her own experience. (S)he will then search for purposeful life goals which give him/her a sense of personal fulfillment

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and identity in terms of his/her life philosophy. Logotherapy offers techniques of search for meaning and hope of finding it, whether or not one is religious, though for the majority of people a religious orientation makes the process much easier and more successful.

Logotherapy is not psychotherapy. The former aims at correcting the human condition of meaninglessness, which may not involve mental illness. The latter aims at correcting the psychodynamics of unhealthy escape and defense mechanisms in facing life problems, which does involve mental illness or emotional disorder. But both lead the individual to face questions of what life means to him/her, and answering these questions leads to the formation of attitudes toward religion.

Logotherapy takes both the mentally ill and the healthy individual to the boundary of religion, and charges her/him to decide for him/herself whether to cross it. In the case of the individual in psychotherapy, this decision will determine whether religion is to be an aid in facing the life problems for which assistance has been sought. Thus logotherapy can be a useful psychotherapeutic adjunct in helping the patient to find the style of life which should be aimed for in dealing with his/her particular problems.

Lack of meaning and purpose in personal existence is termed by Frankl "existential vacuum," manifested primarily by boredom. It is not <u>per se</u> a mental illness, but rather a human

condition, which he believes to affect more than half of the population of our time. But it can combine with the symptoms of mental illness to produce a noogenic neurosis (Gr. nous = the inspirational and aspirational or "spiritual" aspect of mind), or even a psychosis. In such cases both logotherapy and conventional psychotherapy are required, whereas the existential condition alone is treated only by logotherapy.

Logotherapy is the first existential treatment to develop a technique. This technique is basically a process of centering attention upon the assets or intact potentialities of personality, and of detaching it from the failures or frustrations which have previously caused the individual to "cop out" by various means of escape.

Frankl calls this particular technique dereflection. It constitutes the search for meaningful life values. To reverse the cop out, we must explore all sources of values and take a stand on what life means to us. We must then center upon concrete goals which lead to fulfillment of what Frankl terms the "will to meaning."

The search for meaning is always a "spiritual" experience, though by this term Frankl does not imply that it is necessarily religious. It refers rather to the inspirational and aspirational or "higher" aspects of experience which mark humanity as essentially distinct from the lower forms of life. Spiritual, in the logotherapeutic sense, means essentially humanistic.

The search is conducted by a systematic exploration of all areas of potential life values, of which Frankl denotes three: Creative, experiential, and attitudinal.

Creative values are those involved in producing something, though the product may be an intangible influence like that of a teacher or preacher. And these productions may or may not have anything to do with making money: They may represent a cause to believe in and fight for which costs rather than yields a material harvest.

Experiential values are those involved in experiencing the creative productions of others. They may or may not be in a field in which the experiencing individual can himself create.

Attitudinal values are those involved in the taking of a positive attitude toward life situations which we deplore but cannot change. This attitude Frankl demonstrated in more than three years in Nazi death camps. He found that the inmates who could make it through were those who faced the situation with the basic assumption that in spite of the apparent meaninglessness of this horror and the injustice of it all, there had to be a reason for it because there is a reason, a meaning, a purpose for all human experience. This purpose is spiritual in the broad (again, not necessarily religious) sense that it always points to higher and non-material goals--to something beyond the individual him/herself. Belief in this source constitutes a sustaining influence when the

chips are down and we feel inadequate to deal with the conflict or frustration alone.

My particular version of logotherapy is called logoanalysis (2), first to distinguish its specific techniques (which are derived from Frankl's generic concepts), and second, to indicate that the subject is not necessarily ill (as implied by the term, "therapy"), but rather may be suffering only from the human condition of meaninglessness which plagues the world today.

The key to the correction of this condition is found in the existential concept of encounter, that special intimate, and verbally undefinable personal relationship which is felt rather than understood. Everyone needs at least one, preferably several (and few can maintain more) such relationships. Frankl likes to ask a patient, "For whose sake do you suffer the battles of life?" It may be a person or a Higher Power, depending upon the individual's orientation. Frankl also likes to quote Nietzache's statement, "He who has a why for life can stand almost any how." Here why translates ultimately into who.

The technique of logoanalysis is basically a series of exercises aimed at the triple task of (1) analyzing and becoming aware of the key "who's" in the individual's life, (2) discovering a "who" where none exists, and (3) centering upon creative and other value outlets which can supply meaning through their positive effect upon the encounter relationships. Sometimes meaningful goals

can be found before finding a source of encounter if the goals lead to development of suitable contacts for possible encounter sources.

As in all types of logotherapy, only generic principles can be easily taught to other therapists; specific techniques must be developed by each therapist to fit his/her personal approach to life and to the patient or client. But if this is logotherapy's weakness, it is also its strength, for it stimulates maximal creative ingenuity on the part of both therapist and client.

Since, as we have now seen, psychotherapy is a technique of stimulating and educating one to deal with problems, while logotherapy is a technique of leading one to find so strong a motivation to deal with the problems that s(he) will suffer the emotional and/or physical pain involved in handling them, it follows that logotherapy can often be an important adjunct to psychotherapy. This is true because motivation can come only from having a purpose and meaning in life that requires handling life problems satisfactorily in order to fulfill it, and search for such a purpose is the core of logotherapy.

While this purpose need be spiritual only in the broad sense we have defined, and is not per se religious, religion does offer a definite and relatively concrete source of this spiritual meaning that is not easily found by most people elsewhere. It offers what Frankl (1968, pp. 156-157) describes as "unconditional faith in unconditional meaning." This he considers the basis of

successful employment of the attitudinal value--the value which he feels carried the survivors (of whom he was one) through Hitler's death camps. Therefore religion can be the key to finding life meaning in a crisis situation and to motivation to get whatever help--psychotherapeutic or otherwise--is necessary to go on in the face of these difficulties. Thus logotherapy can be a true bridge between religion and psychotherapy through helping the individual to explore the potentialities for life meaning which exist in his/her situation and to find therein a religious component, and in turn to accept psychotherapy as a step in fulfillment of that meaning.

It must be noted that an important consideration in establishing such a bridge for any given client or patient is the question of suitability of a religious orientation to his/her life style or personality. While the majority of people have a need for religious expression at least in times of crisis, some are "turned off" by any approach which suggests dependency of any sort upon any source that cannot be contretized, objectively understood, and controlled. These extreme "materialists" can accept help only from sources which they perceive as leaving their own "internal control" and autonomy intact. They can perceive psychotherapists in this way, but not preachers. The fact that psychotherapy becomes a religion for them is an academic point; it cannot alter their resistance to religious concepts. Whether the preacher should get into the picture is strictly dependent upon the client's perception.

But if the personality has any need in this direction, the logo-therapist may often help to open the perceptive door to this need and ot its fulfillment.

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